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Fashion Conference Submission \_ Track 5

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**Title: The Defiant English Glove Revival**

The Artisan skills of producing handmade, leather gloves, has long been an important trade in the West region of England. The towns and cities stretching from Worcester to Bath and beyond have been, since the seventeenth century a vital provider of employment in the area for both the glove makers, and for the leather tanneries.

The last hundred years saw a marked decline in artisan glove making in this area due to much production being moved abroad.

However, there has been a resurgence of demand for exquisite, hand made, quality gloves due to a variety of social influences, which will be explored in this paper.

Dents glove manufacturer are still producing hand crafted, high quality gloves using leather sourced from local tanneries.

Their archive of gloves and associated promotional accessories is a rich source of social and historical research material in gaining an insight into the importance of the glove industry and its place in English retail.

Today it is a privately owned museum, visited as a design and historical resource for filmmakers, designers and social historians.

The collection that I am researching in addition to other makers and tanneries in the area will uncover a narrative about the lives of the people who made the gloves and still do, as well as a narrative about the Men, Women and Children who wore the gloves and the times in which they lived.

This paper considers the importance of the historical and social associations of gloves in terms of romance, honour and trust, as well as the emotions of hatred and defiance.

It will look at the historic glove collection, which includes gloves worn by Elizabeth 1 and Elizabeth 11, Wallis Simpson, Admiral Lord Nelson, and other unconventional people, or people whose lives experienced joy, tragedy, or sorrow.

Hand crafted leather gloves still have an important role in society today, linked to their ability to portray something unique about an individual's style.

This paper will consider the powerful associations of gloves with femininity, currently in evidence with the huge appeal of historical dramas produced for television such as 'Downton Abbey', as well as the masculine associations of strength and gallantry associated with film characters such as James Bond, 007.

Glove manufacturers in the West of England make gloves for the film and television industries; recently for Daniel Craig in Spectre. Designers of gloves today still refer to historical glove designs to be inspired by the artisan skill and craftsmanship which has existed in this part of England for many years.

My paper will share some of the important historical stories about the famous characters, as well as the ordinary people who made and still make hand crafted gloves, and the power of the connection that links history and current design that exists today.

My research covers several elements of the English leather glove making industry stretching from the beautiful Cathedral city of Worcestershire to the stunning agricultural heritage and countryside of Somerset and Wiltshire. The legacy of this industry helps us discover important aspects about England and the importance of the glove industry today. Its important contribution to the area over the last 250 years will be investigated; the social history in terms of the people whose livelihood depended upon glove making, and the Men, Women and Children who wear leather gloves, for necessity, for fashion and to comply with the rules of etiquette. The ancillary industries related to the gloves themselves and this intricate web/chain of dependency will be explored.

How much of that original glove making tradition has emerged into the modern day? How important is it today in terms of its contribution to our experience of luxurious fashion gloves as accessories today?

Present day consumers are as interested as ever before in buying something both unique and precious. Handcrafted fine leather gloves fulfill such criteria since accessories can be iconic, handcrafted, unique and luxurious all at the same time.

The re-emergence of handmade products is a sign that customers are willing to buy something different and authentic. By exploring this handmade trend we can see that luxurious gloves carry a story and an emotional attachment and are deeply connected with the idea of

artisanship. Exquisite gloves can be regarded as precious items that take on significance and meaning, depending upon where and how they are worn and by whom.

The significance and impact upon the specific geographic area of important glove making skills needs to be looked at in terms of its cultural, social, financial and historical impact. My research looks at the industry and activity that existed historically and throws light on where it is today. The revitalisation of the tanneries and glove industry today is hugely important to the area.

Almost 100 years ago, this same topic was considered worth investigating and recording with information being provided by the early glove pioneers, Messrs. Dent and Allcroft, whose names will be mentioned in this paper again.

Their research was intended to "kindle a deeper interest in the British branches of the trade, the activities of which deserve to be more widely known and appreciated than they seem to be at the present time"<sup>1</sup>

In this paper I want to reader to understand the background to the English glove industry in the West Country firstly by examining the history of gloves and glove-making and the early importance of Worcester as a significant gloving centre, which as an industry then spread southwards from Worcestershire to Somerset.

The earliest references to gloving as a skilled craft in England do no occur until well into the fifteenth century although clearly gloves had been imported and had been worn before this time. The highly regarded book written in 1921, entitled 'Gloves and the Glove Trade', noted that by the 15<sup>th</sup> Century the English glove trade was an important source of livelihood.

"By the middle of the fifteenth century the English glove industry must have already been regarded as having attained a position of some importance, for in 1463 the importation of gloves was prohibited by an edict of Edward IV in order to afford protection to the growing trade of his "loyal and peaceful citizens, the glovers." This remained in force until 1825 when gloves could be imported to England subject to a small tax. In 1860 this tax was repealed and

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<sup>1</sup> B.Eldrid Ellis. *Gloves and the Glove Trade*. (Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd, London 1921)

The English glove industry was significantly affected by competition from abroad (notably lower quality gloves).

Women do not appear to have worn gloves until the period of the Reformation and during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century they started to be worn as a Fashion item. Prior to that the wearing of gloves was the preserve of men: the clergy and military, and indeed who was allowed to wear gloves was legally protected.

Worcester was one of the earliest centres for the industry. “Glovers here gained a very high reputation for Venetian gloves, made in imitation of those imported from Venice”.<sup>2</sup>

Dents the luxury leather glove manufacturer is today located in Warminster, a beautiful country town near Bath, England and is now almost 250 years old. Their origin was however in Worcester in 1777 when John Dent made his pair of artisan gloves in a timbered cottage. His sons served apprenticeships from the age of 15 to 22. This dynasty of artisans developed the skilled craftsmanship that is still continued today at the top level of the gloving industry. The skilled eye and hand of the craftsman is still today regarded as an essential part of quality glove making.

The company by the name of Dents was originally a combination of two families (Dents and Allcroft) whose livelihood depended upon making and selling leather gloves.

From the date of its founding until 1845 when the Dent brothers John and William retired, it was controlled and owned by the Dent family.

From 1846 until 1873 when he retired control was in the hands of John Derby Allcroft and his partners. From then onwards the company was in the hands of other management.

The history of the Dent family and the Allcroft family indicates their involvement in the geographical vicinity of the company and shows that: -

“ the important members of both families controlling the running of the company were also very much involved in the civil life, social life, and the supporting charities both civil and

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<sup>2</sup>. B.Eldrid Ellis. *Gloves and the Glove Trade*. (London.Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd, 1921)  
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religious in the town and surrounding areas where they worked and lived. Both families became prosperous and prominent citizens”.<sup>3</sup>

To understand the beginnings of Glove making in the West Country we need to go back to 1777 to Worcester when the production of gloves was domestically carried out in the family home, with father and sons dressing, dyeing and cutting the leather and the wife and daughters hand sewing (followed soon afterwards by basic hand treadle machines), including the hand finishing of the gloves.

With the development of steam power from the coal industry it led gradually to the powering of sewing machines, to heated factories and to the fellmongering (a dealer in hides or skins who might also prepare the skins for tanning<sup>4</sup>) and dressing of the leather skins in factories. And so the glove industry moved from a simple domestic sphere into an industrial sphere.

The important change from sewing gloves by hand to machine sewn gloves occurred in the 1860's and 1870's. Improvement in production did not necessarily result in improved working conditions for the employees: -

“While industrialization brought about an increased volume and variety of manufactured goods and an improved standard of living for some, it also resulted in often grim employment and living conditions for the poor and working classes”.<sup>5</sup>

In that part of the country, needles were manufactured in (Redditch) close to Malvern. This industry became important in Victorian times again due to the development of machinery and introduction of steam power used to drive it.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century these needles were sold to the furthest reaches of the British Empire – to Africa and beyond. 70% of the world's needles were produced in Redditch, England. Today, some of the original machinery is still in use, being now well over 100 years old. Production is on a much smaller scale but still retains importance.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *History of Dents. January 1995*

<sup>4</sup> The name is derived from the Old English 'fell' meaning skins and 'monger' meaning dealer

<sup>5</sup> 'Industrial Revolution." History.com staff 2009.

<http://www.history.com/topics/industrial-revolution> A+E Networks. Accessed 18th March 2016

<sup>6</sup> 'Great Railway Journeys' - BBC Television programme (Worcester to Bath trip).

Another very significant company, Fownes Gloves of Worcester must be considered in relation to the longevity of the glove industry in the West Country today. Fownes began life in the same city as Dents, both being household names for 200 years before merging during 1970 when it was renamed as Dent Fownes Ltd.

John Fownes, the founder of the glove business, was married in 1782 to Lucy Dymock in the City of London. They had a large family of 11 children, three of whom joined the business. The Worcester Factory opened in 1877 but John Fownes also set up an office in Leicester Square, London. In 1808 two sons became partners in the business that then changed its name to John Fownes & Sons. After John Fownes death in 1827, the firm became Fownes Bros. And it was under this name that it opened in Cheapside, in the City of London in 1848. This area, close to St Paul's Cathedral was considered a very fashionable shopping destination at that time.

The Fownes glove factory in Worcester was highly regarded for its high quality of Leather gloves, and they counted the Royal family amongst its illustrious clients. They employed more than 1,000 people and it was one of the world's leading glove makers with offices and factories in many parts of the world.<sup>7</sup>

The local canal played a key part in the success of the business: -

“Raw materials came on barges plying the nearby Worcester – Birmingham canal and the finished products were also exported that way for many years.”<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, glove production and its associated industries played a significant role in the success of the local economy: - “The hey-days of glove making in Worcester were between the 1790's and 1820's, when the City had more than 150 glove firms.” In Worcester only two companies survived into recent times, those set up by John Dent and John Fownes, who both thrived for many years until they merged in 1972. The combined Dent Fownes factory finally ceased

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<sup>7</sup> “History of the Fownes hotel.” <http://www.fowneshotelworcester.co.uk/about-us/trainingpageforrichard/> 2016. Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016

<sup>8</sup> “Old pictures recall glory days of Worcester's famous Fownes glove factory.” Mike Pryce. 28<sup>th</sup> September 2015 [http://www.malverngazette.co.uk/news/13788145.Old\\_pictures\\_recall\\_glory\\_days\\_of\\_Worcester\\_s\\_famous\\_Fownes\\_glove\\_factory/?ref=rss](http://www.malverngazette.co.uk/news/13788145.Old_pictures_recall_glory_days_of_Worcester_s_famous_Fownes_glove_factory/?ref=rss) Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016

production in 1973, when “it remained empty for 12 years until it was transformed into a hotel in 1985.”<sup>9</sup>

The Fownes hotel has tremendous history as part of the Victorian glove tradition whereby ladies wore gloves a great deal of the time for practical protection as well as meeting the requirements of both etiquette and fashion.<sup>10</sup>

Gloving, second to the cloth industry in terms of importance as a major industry had, by 1825, become the most important trade in Worcester. In 1808 there were 70 Master cutters and 6000 employees which by 1825 had double to 140 Masters and 30,000 employees in the Worcester area. Unfortunately, trade was negatively affected by smuggled goods, which came from Europe. Notably, Ladies Kid gloves smuggled from France. Ladies of the time preferred the fine quality French Kid gloves against any other leather. It was softer and more desirable than other leathers in England at that time. It had the lightest weight and quality being durable yet thin, soft, pliable, and attractive.

The best types of kid leather was obtained from the skins of young goats which compared with Lambskin was not readily available in England.

Sadly in 1826 the restriction on the importation of gloves from abroad was lifted forcing UK glove makers to be in direct competition with rivals from abroad. Many small firms could not cope with this and closed down. The industry realised that to compete with imported quality gloves it must improve upon the quality of gloves being produced through better skin dressing. However, they produced gloves from chamois, goat, sheep and buck but not Kid.

It resulted in the UK being known for producing the best quality of gloves for Men, and France producing the better quality of gloves for Ladies.

“An old proverb said that it took three kingdoms to make one glove: Spain to provide the kid, France to cut it out and England to sew it”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Old pictures recall glory days of Worcester’s famous Fownes glove factory.” Mike Pryce. 28<sup>th</sup> September 2015  
[http://www.malverngazette.co.uk/news/13788145.Old\\_pictures\\_recall\\_glory\\_days\\_of\\_Worcester\\_s\\_famous\\_Fownes\\_glove\\_factory/?ref=rss](http://www.malverngazette.co.uk/news/13788145.Old_pictures_recall_glory_days_of_Worcester_s_famous_Fownes_glove_factory/?ref=rss) Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016

<sup>10</sup> “Fownes Glove factory in Worcester which is now hotel.”Vaderslovechild.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYJMAU-l89Y> Uploaded on Jan 20, 2012  
Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016.

<sup>11</sup> “Crash Course In Victorian Gloves.” 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2010  
<http://gwtwscrapbook.blogspot.co.uk/2010/09/crash-course-in-victorian-gloves.html#.Vqew4IRbvzJ> Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016.



Only the very refined sections of society who wore kid gloves: “wearing kid gloves was the sartorial equivalent of pale white skin, that is, it indicated that the wearer was rich enough to indulge in a life of genteel indoor idleness”.<sup>12</sup> They were very expensive and were a sign of good situation in society and wealth.

“In fact, the description 'kid-gloved' came to be used as an insult, implying a lack of manhood, as was recorded in *The Leicester Chronicle* in January 1842:

This contraband system of political allusions appears to suit the taste and nerves of the cautious, gentlemanly, kid-gloved Conservatism, which cannot endure the shock of attending a public meeting.”<sup>13</sup>

However, over time offices and leather yards were opened abroad in Paris and Grenoble as well as in Leicester to improve and broaden the types of skins used to make gloves.

In the nineteenth century “Gloves were an indicator of a person's social and economic status, so nothing but the best quality would do. The cutting was the essential part, for gloves had to be fit to the hand of the wearer. This was not an era that encouraged mass-production for luxury items: hands had to be measured for gloves, just like feet were measured for boots”.<sup>14</sup>

The tanneries of Victorian England notably to be found in the Bristol area close to the mouth of the River Avon (which formed the historic boundary between Gloucestershire and Somerset) and Somerset itself, existed in these areas because of the favorable climate, soil and proximity to water. By the Nineteenth Century there were 60 or so tanneries in the prosperous Bristol area alone, but the area was blighted by dirt and disease. The tanneries were filthy and unhealthy environments in those days, with no regulation. Local slate lime (the remains of which can still be seen today) from kilns in Somerset was used to prepare the skins for tanning<sup>15</sup> and the cocktail of liquid used to treat the animal skins was unfortunately steeped with bacteria.

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<sup>12</sup> Handle with Kid Gloves. Gary Martin 1996. <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/handle-with-kid-gloves.html> Accessed 22nd March 2016

<sup>13</sup> Handle with Kid Gloves. Gary Martin 1996. <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/handle-with-kid-gloves.html> Accessed 22nd March 2016

<sup>14</sup> “Crash Course In Victorian Gloves.” 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2010  
<http://gwtwscrapbook.blogspot.co.uk/2010/09/crash-course-in-victorian-gloves.html#.Vqew4IRbvzJ> Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016.

<sup>15</sup> “Pre Industrial Lime Kilns.” Nicky Smith. 2015  
<https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-preindustrial-lime-kilns/preindustriallimekilns.pdf/> Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016.

Later after the Second World War, a slump followed an industry boom, which resulted in rationalisation of the industry

The tannery today that specialises in providing gloving leather to notably Dents glove manufacturers in Pittards Ltd, based in Yeovil, Somerset. It has a large modern factory for processing leather, as well as producing its own range of bags and gloves. It has a tradition that is over 600 years old. This industry is close to the River Yeo, a very important factor because of the large volume of water required for processing. “Pittards employ 326 people with a turnover of almost 35 million pounds. 70% of product being exported internationally”.<sup>16</sup>

Pittards is recognised as the world’s premier glove tannery, dedicated to producing the world’s finest and most technologically advanced gloving leathers using ecologically friendly tanning processes, very different from those used in the past. The business was established in 1826 and produces high quality leathers for gloving, footwear, and luxury leather goods and sports equipment and accessories.<sup>17</sup>

Dents' leather buyers have been buying Hair sheep leather from Pittards for over 100 years, but they also source other types of leather globally. Together with Dents' designers, they select only the finest leathers and materials for their gloves including Hair Sheep, Deerskin, and Lambskin

Leather is a natural product that is a completely sustainable and renewable resource. Possessing strength and flexibility it is also breathable and these special characteristics ensure that it is comfortable to wear.

Being totally natural, with its own unique variations, nuances of colour and markings, every piece has its own individual characteristics and distinct beauty.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Leather. Pittards of Yeovil.”1986. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/domesday/dblock/GB-356000-114000/page/11> Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016.

<sup>17</sup> “Yeovil Leather goods manufacturers Pittards acquires £3.6m tannery.”  
[WMNOVergnault](http://www.westernmorningnews.co.uk/Yeovil-leather-goods-manufacturers-Pittards/story-26804596-detail/story.html#ixzz3yGJT2B8F) | Posted: June 30, 2015. [www.westernmorningnews.co.uk/Yeovil-leather-goods-manufacturers-Pittards/story-26804596-detail/story.html#ixzz3yGJT2B8F](http://www.westernmorningnews.co.uk/Yeovil-leather-goods-manufacturers-Pittards/story-26804596-detail/story.html#ixzz3yGJT2B8F)  
Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> March 2016

<sup>18</sup> “About Leather Gloves.” <http://www.dents.co.uk/General/leather-gloves/> Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016

Dents sources Aniline leather, which requires the finest of quality raw materials. The leather used by Dents for its gloves is a by-product of the food, wool and dairy industries.

Peccary is regarded as the world's most rare and most luxurious gloving leather, originating from wild hogs in South America. Dents are one of the few glove manufacturers in the world that still uses this very special leather. The reason being that only a highly skilled master glove cutter with specialist can cut it. In the way that Vicuna is viewed as a rare and luxury material so too is Peccary regarded in leather gloves.

Businesses such as Dents and Pittards are celebrated because of the skills and brand qualities and exceptional heritage within the county of Somerset.

Brand Somerset is the greatest marketing tool for the county's industry, business leaders have been told. "It's not a question of separating the heritage from what we need to do to move forward, it's a question of taking that heritage and building on it." Using this aspect, as a marketing tool is clearly important in terms of: "the added value that being 'Made in Somerset' provides"<sup>19</sup>.

Pittards recently purchased a £3.6 million purpose built tannery in order to speed up its expansion plans. They use new advanced leather technologies to offer better performing products to its global client base including Dents, Nike, Footjoy and Berghaus.<sup>20</sup>

The symbolism of the glove has evolved and metamorphosed but "it will be seen that the glove has long figured as a token of trust and of honour, and also as a symbol of defiance. To-day, it is esteemed the wide-world over as a pledge of friendship and an emblem of confidence". And clearly it is symbolic of a well-dressed person of fashion and symbolises respectability.

Depending upon the wearer, the glove can be viewed as a token of strength: "According to old

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<sup>19</sup> "Why Brand Somerset adds value for Business." WMNH Finch Posted: June 08, 2015 <http://www.westernmorningnews.co.uk/Brand-Sovalue/story-26656223-detail/story.html#ixzz43jRPzMkI> Accessed 22nd March 2016

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.westernmorningnews.co.uk/Brand-Somerset-adds-value/story-26656223-detail/story.html#ixzz3yGIv8yBA>  
By WMNH Finch. Posted: June 08, 2015 Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016

Germanic law, the hand was the great symbol of power, and no doubt the glove derived some of its significance from that fact”.<sup>21</sup>

Dents have produced the gloves worn by Daniel Craig (James Bond 007) in both Skyfall and Spectre.

The infamous ‘Joker’ character in the Batman films, played by Jack Nicholson wore gloves made by Dents.

Gloves certainly provide some unusual anecdotal associations which although, cannot readily be proven, offer grim stories, for example that of poisoned gloves being used to a deadly effect. It is thought that Catherine De Medici gave a gift of gloves impregnated with poison to Jeanne d’Albret, The Dowager Queen of Navarre in order to carry out her assassination. Even though the discord between the two women was well known throughout France, many people assumed that Queen Catherine would surely have sent a pair of sweet gloves to the mother of her son’s fiance, particularly because it was she who introduced to France, from her home of Italy the practice of infusing gloves with sweet fragrances, known as ‘sweet gloves’. This process involved scenting the leather with herbs, spices, woods and flowers such as Jasmine, Violet, Iris and Orange blossom. Being permeable, leather readily absorbed and retained these perfumes.

The question is whether or not the royal gift was laced with poison as well as perfume?

“What is certain is the Catherine brought to fashion the use of perfumed gloves in France. The artistry and symbolism of fragranced gloves is as exceptional as poisoned gloves, and would have certainly been a much lovelier gift to receive. In fact, the trend of the perfumed glove continues to this day, with brands like Guerlain and Maître Parfumeur et Gantier producing limited edition leather gloves saturated with fine fragrances. Perhaps this is all thanks to Queen Catherine de’ Medici.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> B.Eldrid Ellis. *Gloves and the Glove Trade*. (London.Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd, 1921) Pages 9, 10

<sup>22</sup> “How Catherine de Medici Made Gloves laced with poison fashionable.” Julia Davis. February 12<sup>th</sup> 2016 <http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/how-catherine-de-medici-made-gloves-laced-with-poison-fashionable> Accessed 15th March 2016

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century gentlemen of fashion followed a strict code of rules as laid down by the famous Count d'Orsay: "An English gentleman," he said, "ought to use six pairs of gloves a day. In the morning to drive a britzka<sup>23</sup> to the hunt, gloves of reindeer. At the hunt, to follow a fox, gloves of shammy leather. To return to London in a Tilbury,<sup>24</sup> after a drive at Richmond in the morning, gloves of beaver. To go later for a walk in Hyde Park, or to conduct a lady to pay her visits, coloured kid gloves, braided. To go to a dinner party, yellow dog's skin gloves. And in the evening, for a ball or rout, gloves of white lamb-skin, embroidered with silk". Times have well changed whereby our day is not dictated by having the right pair of gloves for any particular moment but "the glove is still almost universally regarded as a badge of gentility".<sup>25</sup>

The glove museum at Dents and the collection of gloves at the Fashion Museum in Bath (on loan from the Worshipful Company of Glovers<sup>26</sup>) both have extensive collections including many examples of 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Century gloves.

There has been a strong association between Dents and the English Royal family over a very long period of time.

Dents produced the Coronation Glove of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, it was worn by Her Royal Highness at her Coronation in Westminster Abbey on the 2nd of June in 1953.

The company had also been chosen to make her father's; King George VI's Coronation glove in 1937. The company had too been a favorite with Queen Victoria, (our current Queen's Great, Great Grandmother) and their archive contains a pair of her fabric gloves.

Edward, Prince of Wales, Uncle of our Queen (known to close friends and family as David) visited the factory in 1923 (later after the death of his father, George V, he became King

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<sup>23</sup> A britzka is a type of horse-drawn carriage. It was a long, spacious carriage with four wheels, as well as a folding top over the rear seat and a rear-facing front seat. Pulled by two horses, it had a place in the front for a driver.

<sup>24</sup> A Tilbury is a light, open, two-wheeled carriage, with or without a top, developed in the early 19th century by the London firm of Tilbury.

<sup>25</sup> B.Eldrid Ellis. *Gloves and the Glove Trade. (Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd, London 1921)*

Edward VIII, the King who in 1936 gave up the throne for the woman he loved, American divorcee, Wallis Simpson. As the Duke and Duchess of Windsor they became tremendous icons of style.

Today a collection of gloves that belonged to Wallis Simpson, Duchess of Windsor, is part of the Dents glove collection. Mrs Simpson was a fascinating and enigmatic socialite who nearly became Queen of England.

“Neither beautiful nor brilliant, she nevertheless became one of the most talked-about women of her generation, and she inspired such deep love and adoration in Edward VIII that he gave up a throne and an empire for her”.

Today, years after her death, the story and style of Wallis Simpson still intrigues and fascinates people because she was so charismatic and people remember her unique style.

“In death, the Duchess became a style icon, a symbol of empowerment, a woman whose unequivocal aim was to win in the game of life.”<sup>27</sup>

The Duke himself was regarded as something of style icon too, and spoke with authority about good taste and luxurious design. He lavished expensive Cartier jewels and gifts upon his beloved wife whilst describing her as ‘elegance personified’. Her jewellery, according to Sothebys the London based auction house, was never understated, it was always powerful, visible, strong and highly coloured.<sup>28</sup>

The collection of gloves came in a box which when the lid was lifted, contained not only the gloves she wore in her glamorous life, but from which the waft of her favourite perfume reached the air.

“Although no classical beauty, she always dressed immaculately in haute-couture - Chanel, Givenchy or Dior - complemented by fabulous jewellery.

By the end of her life, she had amassed a legendary collection. She favoured imaginative pieces specially designed for her....”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> A. Sebba. *That Woman. The Life of Wallis Simpson Duchess of Windsor*. (The Orion Publishing Group, UK, 2011) Introduction.

<sup>28</sup> “Jewels, formerly the property of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.”

<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2013/fine-jewels-113052.html> Accessed 15th March 2016

<sup>29</sup> “Robbed, abused, sedated, alone... the desperate last days of the Duchess of Windsor.” Hugo Vickers. Updated: 11:06, 20 March 2011

Wallis was aware of her shortcomings. She once wrote: 'I'm nothing to look at. So the only thing I can do is dress better than everyone else.' The famous photographer Cecil Beaton commented: 'I am certain she has more glamour and is of more interest than any public figure.'<sup>30</sup>

“Designers vied to dress her. I remember her secretary ringing one of the great Parisian couture houses, informing them that the Duchess would be arriving to inspect pieces from the new season's collection”.<sup>31</sup>

Recently The Duchess of Cornwall visited the Dents glove team with the Glovers Livery in attendance and she presented long service awards on behalf of the Glovers Livery to Dents Staff.<sup>32</sup>

Over the last 100 years gloves have gradually transformed into statement pieces, thanks to both Royal and celebrity influences as well as the ever –changing iconic trends. Gloves have dramatically transformed into statement pieces thanks to the fashion movements from each era. In 1955 Christian Dior asked Dents to make an exclusive glove range for them which was marketed both in the UK and internationally.

Dents British gloves currently sell internationally in over twenty countries to the market apex, including Saks Fifth Avenue, J.Crew and Neiman Marcus in the United States, Harry Rosen in Canada and into Harrods, and House of Fraser in the UK.

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Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016

[http:// www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1367933/Wallis-Simpson-Robbed-abused-Duchess-Windsors-days.html#ixzz3xy9qmzcN](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1367933/Wallis-Simpson-Robbed-abused-Duchess-Windsors-days.html#ixzz3xy9qmzcN)

<sup>30</sup> “Robbed, abused, sedated, alone... the desperate last days of the Duchess of Windsor.” Hugo Vickers. Updated: 11:06, 20 March 2011

Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1367933/Wallis-Simpson-Robbed-abused-Duchess-Windsors-days.html#ixzz3xyBOPTXs>

<sup>31</sup> “Robbed, abused, sedated, alone... the desperate last days of the Duchess of Windsor.” Hugo Vickers. Updated: 11:06, 20 March 2011

Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1367933/Wallis-Simpson-Robbed-abused-Duchess-Windsors-days.html#ixzz42Dk1I27H>

<sup>32</sup> <http://blog.dents.co.uk/tag/hrh-the-duchess-of-cornwall/> 24<sup>th</sup> February 2105. Lauren

Skillman. Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016.

Today, working in collaboration with the skilled craftsmanship of the glove makers, is a highly creative and specially selected design team. This collaboration contributes enormously to the production of iconic statement pieces of fashion accessories. Some designs have even become well known through Television and Film productions, including period dramas like *Downton Abbey*, and action films such as James Bond. Perhaps this has contributed to the resurgence in popularity of gloves as a statement fashion accessory for Men and for Women.

“In the last five years, there does seem to be a trend of people wanting to dress more lady or gentlemanlike. Boxy handbags are back in fashion, and the two go hand and glove, so to speak. There’s also been a return to authenticity. Like food, people want to know it’s come from a good source,” says Deborah Moore the Chief Executive Officer of Dents.<sup>33</sup>

The Provenance and heritage of a product is part of the brand equity and appeal.

The glove collections of Dents and the Fashion Museum are important not simply because of the artifacts themselves but because of social history and very personal stories surrounding them. Gloves take on the shape of the wearers’ hands. They absorb the perfume of the wearer. They are symbolic of the personality of the wearer.

The archivist cataloguing the gloves that belonged to Wallis Simpson, Duchess of Windsor said that upon opening the box of gloves a waft of beautiful overpowering perfume was released into the air. Wallis Simpson had died in 1986 but her undoubted style and personality came back through her gloves. Guerlain’s L’Heure Bleu<sup>34</sup>, Mitsouko.<sup>35</sup> And Joy<sup>36</sup> by Jean Patou, were all her favourite perfumes. Sometimes she wore more than one perfume at once, which no doubt is still contributing today to the perfume wafting into the air.

Today it still takes Dents’ craftspeople 32 different operations to manufacture a single pair of gloves. The gloves are still cut by hand, one pair at a time in evidence of the preservation of the necessary artisan skills for such exclusive market demand.

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<sup>33</sup> “Historic glove maker Dents on why there's still demand for luxury British goods.” Elizabeth Anderson. 09<sup>th</sup> May 2015. Accessed 05<sup>th</sup> March 2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk>

<sup>34</sup> Neroli, Iris and Vanilla. Launched in 1912

<sup>35</sup> Bergamot, Iris, Rose *Oakmoss*, Vetiver & *Labdanum* launched in 1919

<sup>36</sup> Created for Parisian couturier Jean Patou by perfumer Henri Alméras in 1929. It is considered to be one of the greatest fragrances created and is a landmark example of the floral genre in perfumery. It is a blend of Jasmine and Rose.



There was a time when a woman or gentleman would seldom be noticed in general public without having a pair of gloves. An object of “luxury, elegance and refinement”, in accordance to a nineteenth century trend handbook, gloves had been an essential accompaniment to any outfit.

In England, many of these would have been produced by Dents, an English glove maker set up in 1777. Virtually 240 many years on, Dents is continuing to sell its creations to clients searching for a sophisticated accessory.

Firms are wise to retain artisan skills which although labour intensive are extremely appreciated in the luxury sector, which includes a wide range of products from food, to wine, to accessories and clothing. It is one of Europe's most important industries, worth some 17% of Europe's total merchandise exports in 2013, according to industry lobby group the European Cultural and Creative Industries Alliance (ECCIA).

And increasingly where something is made and how it is made are important factors for consumers when they make a purchasing decision.

ECCIA president Michael Ward says 80% of people look at a product's label first to see where it has been made.

"If we look at what's driving the luxury market; it's about craftsmanship, originality and tradition. It's all about adding value. How many stitches in a Fendi bag, how long does it take to train a weaver, for example, are all hugely important in terms of the product proposition."<sup>37</sup>

This is very heartening for the artisan leather glove making skills and its associated industries that continue to be valued and appreciated by consumers today. This heritage has been retained for several hundred years and with appreciation of fine quality, it may well continue for a long time into the future.

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<sup>37</sup> “The Artisans in danger of disappearing.” Katie Hope. 11<sup>th</sup> March 2015. Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-31791937>